

# Officials see opportunities in junk-filled land

By JULIE DAFFERN

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Through piles of trash and discarded furniture hidden within 57 acres of the La Presa subdivision, county officials see opportunity for untapped income and education.

Plans are underway to turn the illegal dumping site into a bird sanctuary and bring eco-tourism to Webb County.

"Eco-tourism is one of the fastest growing industries," said Juan Vargas, director of Economic Development. "The valley is a hot spot for birding.

## Saving La Presa/Focus

We have birds, and we have birds that no other area has."

In a Commissioners Court meeting March 29, \$25,000 was allocated to survey and fence the property. After it is fenced, the county plans to clean up the trash and put up a bird watching station, according to Penny Warren, grant writer for the Economic Development department.

A few miles east of U.S. 85 on Mangana Hein Road, Warren navigates through old mattresses, sofas and tires, basically a graveyard of unwanted house-

hold items, to reach privately-owned property that has been put up for sale.

The current owners have placed a fence down the middle of a small pond behind the house, indicating the property line between what is theirs and what is the county's. The pond appears to be a retreat for many types of birds, but Warren seemed most impressed by what she identified as the Least Grebe.

"That's a money bird," Warren said.

She said hundreds of people would come to see the type of bird that's not commonly seen in

northern parts of Texas.

Warren described the bird as aquatic, with its legs far back on its body, so instead of walking, it scoots on the ground when it's not in water, which is rare.

"It's always on the list of birders that come down here," she said.

Commissioner Jerry Garza said he gave up the money for the project because he wants to diversify the economy and tap into the industry.

"It's number one now of all the outdoor sports in terms of dollars spent," Garza said. "If that's the

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Photo by Guillermo Sosa | Laredo Morning Times

Penny Warren looks at a junk-strewn lot – piled high with trash and discarded furniture – in La Presa subdivision last week. Warren is the grant writer for the county's Economic Development department.